DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 471 690 PS 030 851

AUTHOR	Juvonen, Jaana; Cadigan, R. Jean
TITLE	Social Determinants of Public Behavior of Middle School Youth: Perceived Peer Norms and Need To Be Accepted.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	22p.; In: Academic Motivation of Adolescents. Adolescence and Education Series; see PS 030 841.
AVAILABLE FROM	Information Age Publishing, Inc., 80 Mason Street, Greenwich, CT 06830. Tel: 203-661-7602; Fax: 203-661-7952; Web site: http://www.infoagepub.com.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Adolescent Attitudes; *Adolescent Behavior; Conformity; *Early Adolescents; Health Behavior; *Middle School Students; Moral Values; Norms; *Peer Acceptance; Peer Groups; *Peer Relationship; Social Behavior; Social Values; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS	*Self Presentations

ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to reconcile findings suggesting that early adolescence is a time during which students' motivation declines and disciplinary problems increase, and those suggesting it is a time during which youngsters endorse attitudes and values consistent with those of their social structure. The aim of the chapter is to integrate interpretations of this disparity between personal beliefs and behavior provided by scholars from differing social science disciplines. The chapter notes social psychological literature supporting the idea that behavior is affected by one's own attitudes and significant others' expectations and perceived attitudes. Developmental research shows that young teens are cognizant of the fact that their values differ from others' and that they need to vary their self-presentation to facilitate social approval. Peer approval becomes especially salient during early adolescence and public behavior is motivated by teens' desire to behave consistently with perceived peer group norms. The heightened need for peer approval, paired with the need for being seen as less dependent on adults, coincides with the transition to middle school. In this setting, young teens are especially likely to sort their social world into "us" versus "them." Although this categorization helps youth master their expanding social world, it fosters a peer culture incompatible with the values endorsed by the most likely out-group, adult authorities. The perceptions of peer norms combined with the need to identify with a new peer collective, guide young teens' public behavior, often conflicting with private values. This chapter covers research on a range of relevant behaviors, including health-compromising,achievement-related, and social behaviors. The chapter concludes with concrete suggestions for moderating the behavioral changes of young adolescents. (Contains 53 references.) (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 471 690

PS 030 651

CHAPTER 10

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR OF MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH

Perceived Peer Norms and Need to be Accepted

Jaana Juvonen
RAND
R. Jean Cadigan
UCLA

Middle school years are often portrayed as the most difficult phase of young people's lives. Parents and teachers report that students' academic motivation declines and disciplinary problems increase (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). Such problems are often attributed to changes in young teens' attitudes and values. Yet there are a number of studies that document youth endorsing attitudes and values that are consistent with those of most adults in our society. For example, adolescents believe that education is important to get ahead in society (Allen, Weissberg, & Hawkins,1989; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). But this belief does not seem to relate to, or explain, the public behavior of young adolescents in school, where they appear unmotivated and at times rebellious, challenging school rules and "causing trouble." Thus, there appears to be a disparity between adolescents' personal values or beliefs and their public behavior.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. F. Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Social scientists have provided various interpretations for this disconnection between personal beliefs (cf. values, attitudes) and behavior. Our goal is to integrate some of the interpretations provided by social and developmental psychologists as well as sociologists and anthropologists. We focus our analysis on social norms and specifically perceived values of school-based peer groups. The chapter is designed to provide insights into why and how perceived peer group values, in contrast to personal values, might be critical determinants of public behavior in middle school. In our analysis, we review studies that cover a range of behaviors that are relevant for young teens, including health-compromising behaviors as well as achievement-related and social behaviors.

To provide examples of some of the main conceptual points, we rely on past research as well as include excerpts from a recently completed ethnographic study of social relations and peer culture in a large, urban middle school called Fernwood (Cadigan, 2002). Each year, approximately 450 sixth graders enter Fernwood from five different elementary schools. From October 2000 through June 2001, over 100 days of observations and over 50 interviews were conducted with a group of 27 ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sixth graders (16 girls, 11 boys), all members of one physical education (PE) class. Additionally, several naturally occurring conversations were tape recorded and analyzed to examine how social norms and values were created and maintained through conversation. Participant observations occurred during PE class, lunch, before and after school, and at various social functions outside the normal school day. The PE class was chosen as a research site because it afforded an opportunity to observe a relatively small group of students interacting in a more social manner. Rules surrounding behavior in PE class are typically lax and group activities predominate.

All students were given the option of being interviewed alone or with one or two friends from the PE class. While most interviews were structured, less formal interviews took place when several students attended the session. All interviews explored themes documented in observations. The main interview questions concerned changes in peer group norms during the transition from elementary to middle school, academic achievement, conflict and harassment among peers, and social status and popularity in middle school. The interview transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes relating to the wider goals of the study—to understand the development and maintenance of peer culture.

DISCONNECTION BETWEEN PERSONAL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR

Allen and colleagues (1989) found that students in Grades 7 and 8 condemned "getting drunk," and instead endorsed values, such as "doing well on tests" and "volunteering answers in class." Although we do not know how representative their sample was, we want to presume the sample was representative for the sake of the following argument: The very behaviors these youth condemned are prevalent among their age group, whereas those that they reported valuing are rare. About half of seventh- and eighth-grade students report using alcohol (Blum, Beuhring, & Reinehart, 2000). At the same time, teachers might have a hard time believing that most seventh and eighth graders think that academic success and high levels of class participation are important to more than a small minority of their students.

A great deal of social psychological research conducted with college students and older adults also demonstrates that the relations between personal attitudes (cf. values) and behavior are relatively weak (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Thus, the disconnection between personal values and behavior is not unique to young adolescents. Much of the social-psychological research on adults has been guided by the theory of reasoned action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975; see also Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Although Fishbein and Azjen proposed that an individual's behavior is determined by both (personal) attitudes and subjective norms, the latter construct has not received as much attention in empirical research as the former (e.g., Terry & Hogg, 1996). Fishbein and Ajzen maintain that the subjective norm is determined by perceived expectations of specific individuals or groups weighted by the motivation to comply with the expectations of the reference group. The first component (i.e., expectations of others) is typically operationalized as a person's perceptions of the degree to which significant others would disapprove of a particular behavior (e.g., "Do you think your parents/friends would be upset if you failed an important test?"). The latter part of the definition of subjective norm, that is, motivation to comply, is normally inferred rather than directly assessed. Because of the methodological challenges posed by the subjective norm construct, alternative and complementary conceptualizations of social normative influences have been proposed.

Grube, Morgan, and McGree (1986) proposed that in addition to subjective norm (cf. significant others' expectations about one's actions), the perceived behavior of significant others also affects the behavior of individuals (cf. Bandura, 1977). They labeled this construct behavioral norms and found that indeed the effects of the perceived prevalence of the behavior independently predicted both smoking intentions and smoking behavior among young adolescents. White, Terry, and Hogg (1994) further distin-

guished two components of perceived group norms: behavioral norms (i.e., whether peers engage in behavior) and perceived group attitudes (i.e., agreement among group members about the importance of the behavior). They showed that in addition to the predictions by personal attitudes and subjective norms, perceived group norms toward condom use predicted safer sex behaviors among young adults. Thus, in addition to perceptions regarding significant others' expectations, the mere prevalence of the behavior and the perceived attitudes among the members of an important reference group are critical motivators to consider.

For the sake of simplicity, we do not make a distinction here between behavioral norms and group attitudes. Rather, we prefer to use the term *perceived group values*, given that values can be reflected in group members' behavior, attitudes, or both. What is critical about this construct is that it is tapping a perception about the importance of behavior for the relevant group. But how well aware are young teens of the values of others?

PERCEIVED VALUES OF OTHERS AND SELF-PRESENTATION

When Cohen and Cohen (1996) studied developmental differences in the private values and perceived peer values of youth ranging from ages 10 to 17, they found minor differences across the age groups regarding admiration of conventional (i.e., friendly, helpful, getting good grades) and antisocial (i.e., being tough, defiant, or disobedient toward teachers) personal values. However, there were marked differences in perceived values of peers. Specifically, perceived peer admiration of antisocial values increased sharply up to about age 15 with no significant change thereafter, whereas peer admiration of conventional values declined to until age 12 and leveled thereafter. The difference between private and perceived peer values of antisocial and conventional behavior peaked around 13–15 years of age (i.e., during middle school years). Thus, young adolescents seem to be keenly aware of the distinction between what they value and what their peers value.

Research on impression management or self-presentation allows us to understand how the perceived values of others can affect behavior. The effect of perceived values of others on behavior can be best demonstrated by varying the "audience" using experimental procedures. In a series of school-related experiments, Juvonen and Murdock (1993, 1995) examined how students want to portray themselves to their teachers and peers in positive and negative achievement situations. The social motive was controlled in these experiments: Students were specifically told that they want to get along with the teacher or the popular peers. This was done in order to be

able to examine whether youth can adjust their accounts to be consistent with the perceived values of others, not to study their preference to please one party more than the other.

In one of the studies (Juvonen & Murdock, 1995), age-related differences were examined in the public accounts provided for teachers versus popular classmates across Grades 4, 6, and 8 followed by successful and unsuccessful exam performance. In this case, only the eighth graders were in middle school, whereas both fourth and sixth graders resided in elementary settings. Across all three grade levels, the participants were likely to convey to their instructors that they did well in the exam because they had studied hard and were reluctant to say that they failed because of lack of effort. Whereas the youngest students wanted to portray themselves as diligent to both their teachers and peers, the eighth graders did not want to depict themselves as studious to the popular kids in their class. The students were not only reluctant to convey to these popular peers that they did well because they studied hard, but when they did poorly on the imaginary exam, they were eager to tell these peers that they failed because they did not study for the exam. Thus, these middle school youth did not want their peers to view them as studious.

In addition to examining self-presentational preferences, perceptions of the determinants of teacher and peer approval were also investigated with the same students (Juvonen & Murdock, 1995). The participants rated teacher liking and peer popularity of hypothetical students who varied in terms of their level of diligence or laziness. Whereas both fourth- and sixth-grade students thought that hard-working students are preferred over lazy ones by both teachers and peers, the eighth-grade students believed that studious behavior promotes teacher liking, but negatively impacts popularity among peers. Thus, the differentiations between their self-presentational preferences were consistent with the students' views of the discrepant determinants of teacher and peer approval.

The interview findings from Fernwood Middle School were consistent with the research described above, suggesting that early adolescents believe peers value more unconventional and antisocial behaviors than they do themselves. Students remarked that other "kids look up to people who have bad grades," although they themselves think that mentality is "stupid." The following excerpt from an interview with two boys, Nate and Thomas, suggest that the relation between perceived popularity and academic performance is rather complex.

Interviewer: What about kids who get in trouble a lot? Are they cooler than other kids?

Thomas: That makes them popular too.

Interviewer: What about kids who get good grades?

Thomas: It depends.

Interviewer: So if I were a guy and I got really good grades, how would I go about still being popular?

Thomas: You'd still have to have your bad attitude. You have to act—it's just like a movie. You have to act. And then at home you're a regular kind of guy, you don't act mean or nothing. But when you're around your friends you have to be sharp and stuff like that, like push everybody around.

Interviewer: So, if I get good grades—if I'm in class and I'm always like, "Oooh, oooh, I know the answer, I know the answer"—

Nate: Then between periods, like in the hallways, you gotta act tough or something.

Interviewer: I see.

Thomas: Not when your friends are around, you can't say, "Oooh, oooh, I know the answer."

Interviewer: So if your friends are around, then you don't even answer the questions in class?

Nate & Thomas: [Nod their heads yes.]

These two boys are aware not only of the conflict between conventional school norms and peer group norms, but also recognize that public behavior at school is altered from "regular" behavior in the privacy of one's home. They also believe that students can be popular in spite of the fact that they get good grades as long as they present themselves as socially tough outside of the classroom. Thus, this excerpt indicates that adaptive self-presentation requires sophisticated understanding of not only the values of those whom one desires to please, but also of the right balance between various types (e.g., conventional and antisocial) of behaviors.

Taken together, young adolescents are indeed cognizant of the fact that their values are different from the values of others and that the values of various individuals and groups vary. Middle school youth also realize that they can facilitate the social relations between themselves and their target audience by behaving in ways that are consistent with the values of those with whom they interact. However, the fact that youth *can* alter their self-presentation across different parties does not mean that they do. In other words, we cannot presume that young adolescents desire to please everybody but that approval by certain individuals or groups is more critical than by others. Although there is little direct research evidence comparing social motives across various parties, there is strong evidence that peer approval becomes increasingly important for young adolescents (e.g.,

Adler & Adler, 1998; Coleman, 1974; Fine, 1981; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Indeed, the concern for maintaining peer approval seems to peak starting in early adolescence and to diminish after mid-adolescence (Clasen & Brown, 1985). But why does the need for peer approval become so salient during early adolescence?

DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONTEXTUAL REASONS WHY PEERS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT

During early adolescence, youth start spending more of their time with peers than with their family (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1993). This change in shared time should in part reflect shifting personal and social motives. We contend that both the desire to become more autonomous (or less dependent on adults) and the need for relatedness or belongingness (within a peer collective) play a part in this process. We assume that these desires and needs are heightened not only because of developmental changes, but especially during the time when youth are trying to fit in to a new middle school setting.

It is typically during early adolescence when youth desire to be less dependent on adults or authority figures (e.g., Buhrmester, 1996; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999). We propose that what is typically considered as a desire to become autonomous reflects more of a need to no longer be perceived as dependent on adult authority. Specifically, it is the desire not to be controlled by adults and the need to be *perceived* as not needing adult support that seem to matter for young teens.

One example of the contempt that heavy reliance on adults created at Fernwood involved a female student who had no close friends and was repeatedly victimized by her peers. Other students saw her as "childish" (a stigmatizing term used to refer to dependency on adults) because her mother reportedly came to school to have lunch with her and walk her to and from classes. Based on the observation and interview data, it was evident that this perception of the mother's presence at Fernwood made things worse for the student because it made others view the student as overly dependent on her mother. For example, one girl commented that "her mom comes up here sometimes and eat [sic] with her. I'd be so embarrassed . . . I'd be like, 'Mom, get out of here!'"

The observations and interviews of the sixth graders of the Fernwood Middle School youth also revealed that the young teens very much resented the fact that adults (e.g., teachers, parents) control their behavior (i.e., tell them how not to act or look). The sixth graders especially objected to the dress code. These adolescents saw the dress code as a way for adults to control their behavior in a manner that questioned their level

of maturity. Students responded to the dress code by routinely pushing the rules' limits—girls, for example, would wear prohibited spaghetti-strap T-shirts underneath cardigan sweaters they could quickly remove or put on depending on whether an adult authority figure was present.

Resistance to school rules was also documented in a recent ethnographic study of another urban middle school where youth viewed enforcement of rules, such as dress code, as "arbitrary authority exercised by teachers or administrators" (Alvarez, 1993, p. 366). Resistance literature in general recognizes not only the influence of peer culture on adolescents' behavior in school toward adult authority figures, but also highlights the gap between the publicly expressed values and beliefs of peers versus adults (Alpert, 1991; Everhart, 1983; McLaren, 1986; Willis, 1981).

The desire for autonomy does not seem to be affected by adolescents' willingness to comply with perceived peer group norms, however. In other words, the behavioral changes associated with decreased dependence from authority figures do not signal a desire to be independent from peers—quite the contrary. We suspect that conformity to peer group norms is considered voluntary and relates to a complementary need of adolescents, namely to belong. Thus, perception of "free will" might be more critical here than absolute independence per se.

By relying on both qualitative and quantitative methods, several researchers have shown that conformity to peer group norms is more intense in early than in late adolescence (e.g., Berndt, 1979; Canaan, 1987; Clasen & Brown, 1985; Gavin & Furman, 1989). We presume that conformity is especially meaningful for young teens as they transfer to a new school where they are the youngest of the group. Changes in school structure, peer exposure, and changing relationships with teachers are all likely to affect social needs and behavior. Compared to elementary schools, middle schools are not only large but also much less structured—students are no longer taught in self-contained classrooms instructed by one primary classroom teacher (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). When youth do not know all their classmates or have one teacher who is very familiar with them, the need for being part of the group becomes increasingly important (Gavin & Furman, 1989).

In sum, the desire to be less dependent on authority figures (i.e., not wanting to appear dependent on or controlled by adults) and the need to fit in within the new peer collective in the new school environment can help us better understand the increased importance of peers. Although each of these factors can be considered as a step toward total independence or autonomy, we presume that these factors depict more of a need to develop a new social identity. Specifically, we expect that the contrasts between adult authority and peers reflect distinctions made between "us"

and "them" (Harris, 1995). Thus, the development of social identity and in-group and out-group distinctions are integrally related.

SOCIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND POLARIZATION OF IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS

Self-categorization theorists (e.g., Turner, 1982; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) maintain that social identities contribute to categorization of groups into in-groups and out-groups (cf. "us" and "them"). Whereas in-groups are favored, the out-groups are more likely to be negatively stereotyped (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). At times, the mere recognition of out-groups can increase the cohesiveness of the in-group.

We argue that for middle school students, the most basic group distinction pertains to defining peers separate from adults. The polarization of perceived values between these two groups therefore reinforces the distinction between peers and teachers. For example, the interviews of the sixth graders at Fernwood revealed that most students believed that the determinants of teacher and peer approval were in conflict. Much of this discussion involved the notion of coolness, a proxy for desirable peer group values, in relation to teacher expectations.

Interviewer: Is it cool to talk back to a teacher in class?
Thomas: [laughs] No. It affects your grade.
Nate: No. It lowers it.
Interviewer: But what do the other kids think when you do it?
Thomas: They think it's cool.

Thus, the effects of "talking back" are perceived to have the opposite effects for teacher approval and peer group acceptance. We maintain that such a contrast between adults and peers underscores the distinction and distance between the two groups. Furthermore, it seems that by engaging in public behaviors that conflict with the perceived values of adult authority, the sixth-grade students stress (a) their independence from adult control and (b) their alliance with peers (i.e., the in-group).

Based on the observations and interviews at Fernwood, it was clear that students who act in ways that please the teachers run the risk of being called a teacher's pet—a socially detrimental label within the peer collective. The following excerpt partly speaks to the shift in loyalties between teachers and peers across elementary and middle school grades.

Interviewer: What's so bad about being a teacher's pet?

Julia: Because you're always sucking up to a teacher. You're always helping her. You're always staying after or you're always doing things to make her be glad, when other people are just doing what they're supposed to do and not more.

Interviewer: Was it always bad to be a teacher's pet—was it bad in elementary school?

Julia: Fifth grade it was, and fourth. Third, second, first, kindergarten, it wasn't bad.

Interviewer: Why? What's the difference?

Julia: Little kids don't think about it that much. They always get good grades because they like school. And then grade by grade you get more interested in being cool.

Consistent with the previously discussed experiments regarding self-presentation, Julia appears to believe that the determinants of a teacher's favoritism are in conflict with those that make one cool or popular in middle school, but that in the lower grades in elementary school these two social forces were not in conflict. Behaving badly in class and going against a teacher's wishes seems to boost students' social standing also in other cultures. Despite the preconceived notion of strict academic discipline displayed by Japanese youth, young adolescent behavior that tests the boundaries of teacher control in the classroom confers social status among peers (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001).

It appears that young adolescents believe that they cannot publicly make alliances both with peers and with teachers, but have to choose one or the other. We interpret the perception of exclusive group membership to underscore the need to separate the peer collective from the most obvious out-group, that is, teachers and other authority figures. In his discussion of resistance to adult authority in a junior high school, Everhart (1983) concluded that while peers may fight in school, "The underlying and ongoing conflict between the student and the teacher, in many respects the two prime antagonists in the conflict arena, was more pervasive than the conflicts between students."

Although the need for peer approval appears to be strong and instrumental in reinforcing a new social identity, and although there may be an exaggerated need to view the world as adults versus peers, these factors still do not explain why youth behave in ways that are not consistent with their personal values. Are young teens so desperate for peer approval that they do whatever it takes? We think that the answer is somewhat more complex than this. Social psychological research on pluralistic ignorance, a phenomenon that accounts for misperceived values of in-group members, can

help us explain why perceived values of peers might be a stronger motivator of public behavior than one's own private values.

PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE: MISPERCEIVED PEER GROUP VALUES

Although individuals recognize that that their own public behavior does not correspond with their private beliefs, they falsely assume that other individuals' public behavior reflects their private attitudes and values (Miller & Prentice, 1994a, 1994b). Because of this bias, they come to incorrectly view the collective norm as a reflection of the average of the private values of its group members (Miller & Prentice 1994a; 1994b). This phenomenon, labeled as pluralist ignorance, hence arises when "the facades that ... individuals present to one another are so effective that everyone is convinced of their authenticity. Pretence becomes reality" (Miller & Prentice, 1994b, p. 542). Although this is true also with adults, we regard pluralistic ignorance as one of the ultimate ironies of early adolescence because it is during this particular developmental phase when peer group values are perceived to be most different from one's private values (Cohen & Cohen, 1996).

Given that young adolescents are cognizant of the difference between their own values and those presumed of their peers, the question is how they deal with this difference. Theories of cognitive dissonance (e.g., Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959) suggest that individuals strive for a balance. In situations of imbalance, people have two choices: to either alter their attitudes (cf. values) or to change their behavior. We propose that most young adolescents, and especially those who are new to middle school, change their public behavior, not their private values. Thus, young sixth graders do not turn into "bad students" who value antisocial behaviors. Rather, they desire to fit in with the peer group by publicly acting consistently with their perceptions of the group values and norms of the collective.

Ironically, the perceived group values do not reflect the private values of the members of the group, but represent an illusion. Hence, the desire not to be considered as a teacher's pet and a desire to be perceived as cool by one's peers may result in defiant behavior, which in turn encourages this behavior among others—although no individual student necessarily values defiance. From their research on juvenile delinquents, Miller and Prentice (1994b) conclude that "the façade of toughness ... created 'a system of shared misunderstandings...,' which in turn, led to a level of antisocial behavior that no individual member fully embraced" (p. 543). This phenomenon has also been referred to in basic developmental research as well. For example, Berndt (1996) concluded that "adolescents often behave the way

they perceive their friends as behaving. Unfortunately, adolescents often perceive their friends as engaging in socially undesirable behaviors (e.g., using drugs) more often than the friends actually do" (p. 79).

Misperceptions of peer group norms have indeed been of particular interest and concern to researchers who study adolescent drug use. It has been well documented that adolescents tend to overestimate substance use among their peers (e.g., Sussman et al., 1988), and that such overestimates predict their subsequent drug use (e.g., Collins et al., 1987; Graham, Marks, & Hansen, 1991; Marks, Graham, & Hansen, 1992). In light of these findings, increased accuracy of peer substance use is now considered an important component in drug-abuse prevention for young adolescents (e.g., Botvin & Willis, 1985; Ellickson, Bell, & McGuigan, 1993).

But how do the illusory group norms get formed? Group norms can be conveyed and inferred not only by the behaviors of the group majority, but also by the group's high status members. Based on the ethnographic data from Fernwood, it is clear that perceived peer group values often reflect those of the most popular peers, as these students are often the most vocal and visible in the school setting, even though they are, in actuality, a minority group. For example, highly salient cool kids may, for example, "broadcast" their wild party behaviors, or endorse slacking off in school and getting bad grades. These very public endorsements can then become the collective norm if there is an illusion of majority support (Miller & Prentice, 1994b). Illusion of majority support is created by no group member expressing contrary beliefs. We believe that this type of collective lack of resistance or silence is very typical in contexts where the youngest or most recent members need to establish their status within the new group. The following excerpt illustrates a more active form of peer support for behavior that challenges norms set by the school or instructors.

> Interviewer: Are some kids more popular than other kids in your grade?
>
> Patty: Yeah. People who are—if you're bad and you're funny then everybody likes you.
>
> ...
>
> Carolina: Yeah. Like students who make fun of the teacher or something and then everybody laughs.

By laughing at misbehaving class clowns, students support the values that conflict with conventional norms (i.e., to be respectful of teachers).

In sum, among young adolescents, the influence of popular kids—those with the highest status—is substantial. These students establish and maintain the social norms through their prestige, although privately their lower-ranking peers describe them as arrogant (e.g., Eder, 1985, 1995). In spite

of the fact that the behaviors of the popular kids are not representative of the group as a whole, youth wish to emulate their behavior in order to promote their acceptance and inclusion in the high-status crowd. Or is it that they want to conform to demonstrate their alliance with the cool kids in order to avoid peer rejection?

DESIRE TO BE INCLUDED VERSUS FEAR OF EXCLUSION AS THE MOTIVE FOR CONFORMITY?

Thus far, we have presumed that the need to belong to and identify with the new peer collective is a strong motivator underlying conformity to perceived peer group norms. Although this may be the case for many young teens, there is an alternative motive as well. Conformity may result from a fear of exclusion. Exclusion can manifest itself in the majority of the group members rejecting a person or in the ridicule and abuse by few high status members of the collective. At Fernwood Middle School, it is evident that youth wish to be friends with popular students in order to increase their own status, but at the same time the popular students are considered "stuck up" and "mean," a paradox found in other studies of early adolescents (Adler & Adler, 1998; Canaan, 1987; Eder, 1985; Merten, 1996). Indeed, students with the highest status (i.e., the popular students) were often physically, verbally, and indirectly aggressive both with each other and with their peers. In spite of their "mean" behavior, less popular students wanted to wear what popular kids wore and act the way they believed popular kids thought was cool. Again, this finding does not seem to be limited to Western adolescents. Even among Japanese middle school youth, those students who make up the highest status level "are powerful, informal forces whose decisions and opinions prevail even if they are in the minority" (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001, p. 49).

Thus, it seems that conforming behavior at times has more to do with avoidance of exclusion than with an explicit desire to be part of the popular crowd. Furthermore, when students talked about their interest in being popular, they often explicitly stated that being popular is beneficial because it protects an individual from open ridicule by other students, as suggested by the following excerpt.

> Interviewer: How important is it to be popular?
> Nate: Really, really. The most.
> Thomas: 'Cause if you're popular, nobody messes with you.

Harassment was a daily reality for many students, but certain students were harassed more than others. Being seen in any way different (e.g., a

teacher's pet, or as child-like) led to ridicule at Fernwood Middle School. However, students who faced the most ridicule were those who had few, if any, friends. These students, "loners," faced rejection and abuse on a daily basis. All students were keenly aware that loners were ridiculed, and not surprisingly, most youth said that while it would be nice to be popular, what they really desire is to avoid being labeled a loner. Thus, the ultimate motive for peer group conformity was to avoid ridicule and exclusion.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have attempted to challenge the widely held view that the behavioral changes associated with the onset of adolescence are due to changes in young teens' values. We argue that public behaviors do not necessarily reflect private values and review various developmental and social psychological research findings that can help us understand this apparent contradiction.

Social psychological literature supports the idea that an individual's behavior is affected by one's own attitudes (cf. values) as well as significant others' expectations, behavior, and perceived attitudes. Developmental research, in turn, shows that young teens are not only cognizant of the fact that their values differ from those of others, but that they need to vary the way they present themselves to various parties to facilitate their social approval. During early adolescence, peer approval becomes especially salient to youth. Hence, the public behavior of middle school students seems to be motivated by their desire to behave in ways that are consistent with perceived peer group norms.

The heightened need for peer approval, paired with the need to be seen as less dependent on adults, typically coincide with a transition to a middle school. In middle school settings, where there is more of a need to create a social structure due to the relative lack of institutional structure as compared to elementary school, young teens are especially likely to come to sort their social world into "us" versus "them." Although this simple categorization between an in-group and an out-group helps youth master their expanding social world, it also fosters a peer culture that is incompatible or in conflict with the values endorsed by the most likely out-group—authority figures, such as teachers. Hence, the perceptions of peer group norms—which unfortunately fail to reflect the average values of the group—combined with their need to belong to and identify with a new peer collective, guide the way young teens publicly conduct themselves, often despite a contradiction with their private values.

Our analysis of the young adolescents' behavior being determined by perceived peer group norms pertains only to *public* behavior. The distinc-

tion between how youth conduct themselves in public places, such as in school versus in the privacy of their homes, is critical. We suspect that public behaviors are often guided by self-presentational concerns and that these behaviors do not necessarily reflect their own values or "true self" (Harter, 1993). Thus, the fact that young teens seem to be unmotivated to do well in school does not mean that they undervalue academics. Unfortunately, however, public behaviors affect how people treat a person. For example, it may be hard for a student with a reputation of a "slacker" to convince teachers that he indeed studies hard and tries to excel in school. Thus, in some cases, the social reputation that is created to boost peer popularity may become too real and inadvertently compromise the school career of a young teen.

In this chapter, we have focused our analyses on young teens who are acclimating to the new social environment of their middle school. We have depicted a rather homogeneous peer culture, one in contrast to the formal school culture endorsed by instructors. This portrayal is an oversimplification of the social structures and dynamics prevailing in middle school. However, we believe that social categorization begins with a dichotomous in-group–out-group distinction, which gets more complex over time. Both the social systems as well as youth's understanding of such systems get more complex later on in middle school, and by high school various peer crowds defined by a different set of attitudes, values, and behavior can be identified (Brown, 1993).

Taken together, we have argued that simply claiming that young teens are immoral and have questionable or antisocial values that contribute to their increasingly problematic behavior in school is missing a larger point. Rather than blaming teens, we should be asking ourselves whether these undesirable behavioral changes are inevitable or whether any of these social dynamics can be altered by changing middle school structures, policies, and practices to be more adolescent friendly. Could we, for example, create environments where teachers are not considered as an obvious out-group but as allies? Or could we manipulate the social dynamics so that young teens can come to believe that their peers value prosocial rather than antisocial values?

REDUCING REACTIVITY TO AUTHORITY-IMPOSED NORMS

To change the public behavior of young adolescents in middle school to be less "difficult" and more proachievement, one would need to change youngsters' perceptions of teachers as out-group members based on the analysis presented in this chapter. The goal should be to decrease the stark in-group–out-group distinctions (or the perceived polarization of

values) between peers and adult authority figures or at least to diminish the out-group resentment that many middle school students feel toward school staff.

Based on ethnographic data, it is clear that adult authority elicits negative reactions from young adolescents because youth view authorities to control their behavior at a time when they seek to be less dependent on adults. Thus, there is a particularly poor match between the developmental needs of adolescents and their new school environment (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). It seems that authority control will in fact elicit resentment and rebellious responses, thereby contributing to the development of (rather than the reduction of) antisocial behavior. We suspect that this is most likely to happen in large schools where teachers do not know their students personally. In such settings, teachers are controlling because they think that is the only way to manage young adolescents, while young adolescents react to their high level of control by challenging the rules and regulations set by the school staff.

We contend that teaching young adolescents should be viewed more like parenting of young adolescents: behavioral control should be co-negotiated rather than dictated. As Steinberg (1993) states, "transformation of the relationship from one of unilateral authority to one of cooperative negotiation is necessary for the adolescent's social and psychological development to proceed on course..." (p. 265). If students have more input in the establishment of behavioral rules regarding their conduct, and if they can work together with their teachers, who know them, the need to view teachers as out-group members will probably be diminished. Teachers play an integral role in the moderating and shaping of rules and norms and by doing that, they can be perceived as less of an out-group member. Ability to negotiate with students and yet maintain ultimate control over the activities should be the goal of a middle school teacher. But would the less authoritarian teacher behavior also promote more prosocial and less antisocial social norms among students?

Although peer group norms seem to develop in part as a reaction to the heavy-handed authoritarianism prevalent in middle schools, this doesn't explain the unkind and harsh social interactions among students. The ethnographic data from Fernwood reveal that peer group norms are shaped in large part by the vocal and highly salient "cool" kids whose minority power is maintained, on one hand, by the misperceived group consensus or lack of resistance, and on the other hand, by the fear of exclusion or ridicule. Thus, the question is whether such in-group dynamics can be altered.

FOSTERING PROSOCIAL PEER GROUP NORMS

Just like the power of the adult authority, so should the power of dominant peers be diminished to create a more prosocial school environment. As a first step toward such a goal, young adolescents need a chance to step back and see what is happening within their peer collective. While some students are aware of the power dynamics involved, many of them have not necessarily thought about what factors contribute to the social dominance of the few. This can be best accomplished with discussion based on analyses of other places and people rather than one's own school.

Social awareness or empathy training using real-life examples has been successfully implemented in the context of comprehensive, school-wide anti-harassment programs developed in Scandinavian countries (e.g., Olweus, 1993). The goal of these programs is to reduce bullying by changing the prevailing norms that support and maintain dominance by the means of hostility. Youth are shown videotapes of typical peer harassment incidents where one of two bullies can be identified harassing one particular victim. The videos depict all of the situations in ways that highlight the role of bystanders or what might be called the "silent minority." The role of the subtle support and the lack of resistance of the larger peer group in maintaining and reinforcing bullying behaviors by the few dominant individuals become very apparent. The scenarios provide a safe and an engaging context for discussion of the topic that otherwise might be too sensitive, abstract, or difficult to engage in. Furthermore, the public recognition of the problem of harassment provides an impetus for change. In addition, the goal to resist the power of bullies must be supported by school staff who portray themselves not as the adult authority who regulate students' behavior, but as allies who help youth defend their own rights as well as other people's rights to fear-free schooling.

FINAL CONCLUSION

We conclude our analysis of the public behavior of young adolescents by providing two concrete ways in which behavioral changes could be moderated. Environments in which young teens feel that they are listened to and cared about—not merely controlled—and environments where social interactions are part of the explicit curriculum (i.e., topic of common discussion) should alleviate the need to appear tougher and rougher than one is. These changes involve reduction of the distinctions between the most salient in-groups and out-groups (i.e., peers vs. teachers) and reduction of in-group social hierarchies. We hope that our analyses of the behavior, and possible behavior change, of middle school youth convey how

much educators could benefit from learning about research and how important it is for researchers to convey their knowledge to teachers and school administrators to help them see alternative explanations underlying the challenging behaviors of young teens.

REFERENCES

Adler, P. A., & Adler, P. (1998). *Peer power: Preadolescent culture and identity.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Allen, J. P., Weissberg, R. P., & Hawkins, J. A. (1989). The relation between values and social competence in early adolescence. *Developmental Psychology, 25,* 458–464.

Alpert, B. (1991). Students' resistance in the classroom. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly,* 22, 350–366.

Alvarez, A. A. (1993). *An ethnographic study of student resistance in a predominantly Chicano public school.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Berndt, T. J. (1979). Developmental changes in conformity to peers and parents. *Developmental Psychology, 15,* 608–616.

Berndt, T. J. (1996). Transitions in friendship and friends' influence. In J.A. Graber, J. Brooks-Gunn, et al. (Eds.), *Transitions through adolescence: Interpersonal domains and context* (pp. 57–84). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Blum, R.W., Beuhring, T., Rinehart, P. M., (2000). *Protecting teens: Beyond race, income, and family structure.* Center for Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota.

Botvin, G. J., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Personal and social skills training: Cognitive-behavioral approaches to substance abuse prevention. *NIDA Research Monograph Series 63.*

Brown, B. B. (1993). Peer groups and peer cultures. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 171–198). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buhrmester, D. (1996). Need fulfillment, interpersonal competence, and the developmental contexts of early adolescent friendship. In W.M. Bukowski, A.F. Newcomb, et al. (Eds.), *The company they keep: Friendship in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 158–185). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cadigan, R. J. (2002). *An ethnographic study of peer culture and harassment in an urban middle school.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles.

Canaan, J. (1987). A comparative analysis of American suburban middle class, middle school, and high school teenage cliques. In G. Spindler & L. Spindler (Eds.), *Interpretive ethnography of education: At home and abroad* (pp. 385–406). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Clasen, D. R., & Brown, B. B. (1985). *The multidimensionality of peer pressure in adolescence. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 14,* 451–468.

Cohen, P., & Cohen, J. (1996). *Life values and adolescent mental health.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Coleman, J. C. (1974). *Relationships in adolescence.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Collins, L. M., Sussman, S., Rauch, J. M., Dent, C. W., Johnson, C. A., Hansen, W. B., & Flay, B. R. (1987). Psychosocial predictors of young adolescent cigarette smoking: A sixteen-month, three-wave longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 17,* 554–573.

Connolly, J., & Goldberg, A. (1999). Romantic relationships in adolescence: The role of friends and peers in their emergence and development. In W. Furman, B. Bradford Brown, & Feiring (Eds.), *The development of romantic relationships in adolescence* (pp. 266–290). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes.* Forth Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Eccles, J. S., & Midgley, C. (1990). Changes in academic motivation and self-perception during early adolescence. In R. Montemayor & G.R. Adams (Eds.), *From childhood to adolescence: A transitional period?* (pp. 134–155). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Eder, D. (1985). The cycle of popularity: Interpersonal relations among female adolescents. *Sociology of Education, 58,* 154–165.

Eder, D. (1995). *School talk: Gender and adolescent school culture.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ellickson, P. L., Bell, R. M., & McGuigan, K. (1993). Preventing adolescent drug use: Long-term results of a junior high program. *American Journal of Public Health, 83,* 856–861.

Everhart, R. B. (1983). *Reading, writing and resistance: Adolescence and labor in a junior high school.* Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 58,* 203–210.

Fine, G. A. (1981). Friends, impression management, and preadolescent behavior. In S. R. Asher & J. M. Gottman (Eds.), *The development of children's friendships* (pp. 29–52). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Fukuzawa, R. E., & LeTendre, G. K. (2001). *Intense years: How Japanese adolescents balance school, family, and friends.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Gavin, L. A., & Furman, W. (1989). Age differences in adolescents' perceptions of their peer groups. *Developmental Psychology, 25,* 827–834.

Graham, J. W., Marks, G., & Hansen, W. B. (1991). Social influence processes affecting adolescent substance use. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 76,* 291–298.

Grube, J. W., Morgan, M., & McGree, S. T. (1986). Attitudes and normative beliefs as predictors of smoking intentions and behaviours: A test of three models. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 25,* 81–93.

Harris, J. R. (1995). Where is the child's environment? A group socialization theory of development. *Psychological Review, 102,* 458–489.

Harter, S. (1993). Self and identity development. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 352–387). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Juvonen, J., & Murdock, T. B. (1993). How to promote social approval: Effects of audience and achievement outcome on publicly communicated attributions. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 85*, 365–376.

Juvonen, J., & Murdock, T.B. (1995). Grade-level differences in the social value of effort: Implications for self-presentation tactics of early adolescents. *Child Development, 66*, 1694–1705.

Marks, G., Graham, J. W., & Hansen, W. B. (1992). Social projection and social conformity in adolescent alcohol use. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18*, 96–101.

McLaren, P. (1986). *Schooling as a ritual performance: Towards a political economy of educational symbols and gestures*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merten, D. E. (1996). Burnout as cheerleader: The cultural basis for prestige and privilege in junior high school. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 27*, 51–70.

Miller, D. T., & Prentice, D. A. (1994a). The self and the collective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 451–453.

Miller, D. T., & Prentice, D. A. (1994b). Collective errors and errors about the collective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 541–550.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Savin-Williams, R. C., & Berndt, T. J. (1993). Friendship and peer relations. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 277–307). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sussman, S., Dent, C. W., Mestel-Rauch, J., Johnson, C. A., Hansen, W. B., & Flay, B. R. (1988). Adolescent nonsmokers, triers, and regular smokers' estimates of cigarette smoking prevalence: When do overestimations occur and by whom? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 18*, 537–551.

Steinberg, L. (1993). Autonomy, conflict, and harmony in the family relationships. In S. S. Feldman & G. R. Elliott (Eds.), *At the threshold: The developing adolescent* (pp. 255–276). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Steinberg, L., Dornbusch, S. M., & Brown, B. B. (1992). Ethnic differences in adolescent achievement: An ecological perspective. *American Psychologist, 47*, 723–729.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–147). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Terry, D. J., & Hogg, M. A. (1996). Group norms and the attitude–behavior relationship: A role for group identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22*, 776–793.

Turner, J. C. (1982). Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Social identity and intergroup relations* (pp.15–40). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 454–463.

White, K. M., Terry, D. J., & Hogg, M. A. (1994). Safer sex behavior: The role of attitudes, norms and control factors. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 24*, 2164–2192.

Willis, P. (1981). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Youniss, J., & Smollar, J. (1985). *Adolescents' relations with mothers, fathers, and friends.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").